

THE GOOD FIGHT

By JAY E. HOUSE

Illustrated by H. L. Slaughter

IN GRIGSBY CITY "Soldier's Roost" was at once the forum of open discussion, and the court of public opinion. The Roost also exercised legislative function and the work of Congress often was a mere supplementary proceedings. Between times, history (particularly that chapter of it which fell in the interval from 1861 to 1865) was corrected and annotated.

Lemuel Vickers had his stock of dry goods and groceries in the room in which the "Old Boys" met to adjust the delicate political and economic mechanism of government. He also paid the rent of the building. But his business was incidental to the daily meetings of the veterans who gathered there. The place was seldom, if ever, referred to as Vickers' store. To everybody in Grigsby City it was the "Roost." And Lemuel, who had carried a musket through three years of the trouble, regarded the title, one which an irreverent younger generation had given his place of business, as a compliment rather than as an affront.

Most of Lemuel's trade, which was meager enough at best, came from the Old Boys themselves. It could not be said that he was averse to dealing with those who had no personal connection with the putting down of the Rebellion, but he did little to encourage their custom. Unless Lemuel and Uncle Giles Hostettler were again fighting the battle of Lookout Mountain, or except in the event that the daily engagement along the Chickahominy had become general, the chance customer was waited upon with reasonable promptness. But if the customer interrupted the advance of the serried columns of Blue up the side of the Lookout, or interfered in any way with "Old Grant's" movements, he had to wait until the rebels had been put to flight and the wounded properly cared for. The Old Boys, however, were loyal to Lemuel as they had been to the flag. On pension days they cashed and spent their checks at the Roost and Lemuel, in turn, carried many of them on his books for "accommodations" he knew they never could pay.

Few of those who gathered at the Roost had worn the insignia of rank. With two or three exceptions, they had been plain privates or non-commissioned officers. Even Colonel Bob Lipe's title was honorary, his discharge papers indicating that he had been mustered out a corporal. But Colonel Lipe, having for thirty years after the close of the war served his country faithfully as an auctioneer, had been accorded a promotion. And yet, each man wore his epaulet. In the memory of each there lived some moment of valor, some dreary day of suffering, or deprivation, which ranked the gilt and tinselled braid a government might have bestowed. Thus Judson Follansbee, who sat habitually upon the cranberry barrel at the left of the stove, was curiously malformed of jaw, the result of the impact of a "minie" ball and hasty or careless surgery at Resaca; Pliny Tate had lain all day in the rifle pits before Vicksburg with a grapeshot through his lung; Uncle Giles Hostettler, whose right to the empty soap box at the end of the notion counter was never challenged, had been with those who tunneled out of Libby; Israel Giddings' right arm lay behind him on the field of Seven Pines; Brice Watson, a silent man, whose voice was heard but seldom in discussion, had served four years, eleven months and twenty-eight days, responding to the first call for volunteers and coming home only after Appomattox had passed into history.

Of all the men who loitered at the Roost, only one, "Old Jimmy" Marrs, seemed to have no definite place in the picture. Old Jimmy was of the type of human derelict which strands upon the beach of every small town. He was an odd-looking chap with scraggly white whiskers and faded blue eyes that were permanently red and watery. His face was that of one struggling through life mentally agitated by doubt as to whether he should plead for mercy or merely apologize. And his hands, chapped even in the

fairest weather and discolored by the shoemaker's wax with which he strove to staunch the gaping cracks, seemed always upon the point of bleeding.

Old Jimmy had not carried a musket in the great struggle. He had not even gone to the front, but had spent the years of the conflict on an Indiana farm. This in itself was a grave offense to those who frequented the Roost. He also was a Democrat and an atheist, the one a misdemeanor and the other a felony in the jurisprudence of Grigsby City. There was, to be sure, after the Populist upris-



Walked On His Lonely Way Home

ing of the early nineties, when the Populists and Democrats effected a fusion which defeated the Republican ticket, a disposition to condone Old Jimmy's offense in the misdemeanor case. As was often pointed out, he had not only refused to "swallow" the ticket nominated by the fusion forces, but had actually voted for the Republican candidates. Those who were against clemency submitted, however, the well known fact that he still was a Free Trader and had never irrevocably accepted the gold standard, and the sentiment which sought to prevent either commutation or parole prevailed.

The Old Boys showed no open hostility to Old Jimmy. They only ignored him. But their unspoken contempt was less kindly, perhaps, than open hostility would have been. Always a silent man, he ventured toward the last so infrequently upon the conversational sea that the few commonplaces which fell from his lips were often swamped in utterance. He might have found congenial company elsewhere. At Jake Koehler's shoe-shop, where the few men in Grigsby City who did not believe the Bible congregated, he would have received a cordial welcome. The political Insurgents who met three times daily at Marion Tidwell's grocery to lay bare the corruption of the existing order would have admitted him to full fellowship. But Old Jimmy went to Koehler's only when his shoes needed half soling and he bought no groceries at Tidwell's, Lemuel Vickers receiving such custom in that line as he had to give.

And so, as the short years that mark the time of those who have turned the brow of the hill toward the twilight, came and went, Old Jimmy continued to loiter at the Roost. He often came before the morning sweeping and garnishing of Lemuel's emporium had been completed. It was only rarely that he missed an afternoon or evening meeting. No one knew how he lived. It was such an insignificant incident in the narrow life of



Lem Vickers Read the Report of the Twentieth's Progress

(Continued on Page 12)